

Chef says 'no way' to vegan sign overture; Likens slogan request to 'eco-terrorism'

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Body

A Toronto chef facing another bout of vegan protests outside his west-end restaurant this week has been offered a way out: display an animal rights slogan in the restaurant's street-front window and the protests will stop.

The slogan reads "Animals' lives are their right. In their desire to live and capacity to suffer, a dog, is a pig, is a chicken, is a human. Reject speciesism."

"We're not going to - there's no way," Michael Hunter, the chef and owner of Antler Kitchen and Bar, told Joe Rogan during a taping of the popular U.S. podcast The Joe Rogan Experience in Los Angeles on Tuesday. "It's like eco-terrorism, extortion, whatever you want to call it."

The protests outside Antler - which started in December after vegans were dismayed by a sidewalk sign proclaiming "Venison is the new kale" - became the subject of international fascination last month when the chef butchered and ate a leg of deer in full view of the protesters. "I just said, 'Screw it. I'm going to get these people to get out of here,'" Hunter told Rogan. "I thought that that would make them go away."

"It was just totally last resort, totally fed up. I wanted to defend myself, defend our customers. You could see people walking in visibly upset ... I was just upset and I just kind of thought, 'Buzz off.'" The protesters, led by organizer Marni Ugar, announced Friday that they would return to Antler that evening with a projector to shine the slogan onto a wall near the restaurant. "The sign, if you look at what it says, it's just a fact," said Ugar, a local dog walker and head of the activist group Grassroots Anti-Speciesism Shift, or GRASS.

But on Friday night, police told organizers they couldn't project their slogans onto the front of Antler or any of the adjacent buildings. Instead, protesters held screens playing videos of animals being slaughtered and skinned, on a loop. By 7:30 p.m., protesters were planning on shining their slogan on the sidewalk.

"Best meal I've ever had," one Antler patron hollered at protesters as he left the restaurant.

"You guys don't know what you're missing."

Another patron in a light blue suit slipped out of the restaurant, casually took a photo of himself standing beside one of the protesters, then went back inside.

The organizers have decided to also protest outside Pavao Meats & Deli across the street from Antler. The move is in response to Hunter's remark to Rogan, about why his business was selected instead of any other of the

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hundreds of businesses serving meat. "There's an actual butcher shop across the street," he said. "We're an easy target. Our name is Antler."

"You attacked their sacred kale," Rogan said.

In a news release Friday, protest organizers announced they would take Hunter's recommendations and picket outside Pavao.

"I don't get it," the owner of the butcher shop, Luis Pavao, said. "We're a family business ... I think it's childish, what they're doing. They should be supporting the community."

So far, the protests and the international exposure they have generated don't appear to have hurt Antler's business. The restaurant's online reservation system says it's fully booked this evening until 10 p.m.

"We're a little bit busier than normal right now," Hunter told Rogan.

"At this point, it's like dinner and a show. People want to see it. People are requesting the window table."
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Graphic

Tyler Anderson, National Post Files; Animal rights protesters take a stand outside Antler Kitchen and Bar in Toronto on April 12.;

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